



News Releases

Navy Lab in Ghana hosts Malaria Diagnostic Symposium for Representatives from 15 African Countries

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French-speaking AMTF participants from Djibouti, Burundi and Senegal listen to a microscopy lecture with the help of translators during last month's Malaria task Force Symposium in Accra, Ghana.

ACCRA, Ghana – Military members from 15 different countries on the continent of Africa attended a two-week malaria diagnostic symposium in Accra, Ghana, February 27 – March 10, 2017. . The United States Africa Command's (U.S. AFRICOM) Africa Malaria Task Force (AMTF) sponsored the event, which was hosted by the U.S. Naval Medical Research Unit No. 3 (NAMRU-3), Ghana Detachment.

The Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Center (KAIPTC) provided the symposium space as well as the logistic needs for AMTF participants from Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, and Togo. Participants focused on malaria diagnostic techniques and improving identification skills..

The symposium offered discussions on all aspects of malaria diagnostics; from microscopy and lab safety to speciation, artifact detection and multiple-species infections. Each lecture was followed by lab time allowing participants immediate hands-on practice.

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Army Captain Thomas Gilbreath, Chief, Malaria Diagnostic Center, U.S. Army Medical Research Directorate-Kenya (USAMRU-K) was one of several AMTF facilitators responsible for curriculum development.

“I was an AMTF participant last year. My experience from this gave me a better perspective in the development of this year’s curriculum,” said Gilbreath.

Participants were given written and practical tests before and after the completion of the course allowing facilitators to gauge level of knowledge gained.

Scores improved by as much as 45 percent over the course of the symposium, according to Navy Cmdr. Andrew Letizia, officer-in-Charge, NAMRU-3 Ghana Detachment.

For Major Robert M. Gatata, Medical Laboratory Officer, Kenya Defense Forces, Defense Forces Memorial Hospital Nairobi, the microscopy portion of the course was the most important aspect.

“Malaria microscopy was not given enough attention in the degree program. Here, I have been surprised because this kind of exposure makes identification of a malaria parasite much easier,” said Gatata.

According to Gilbreath, many parasites can resemble blood or slide artifacts. It is also difficult to differentiate between some stages in certain parasite species. It was important to devote 50 percent of the sessions to hands-on microscope slide reading, identification and detection as these are fundamental aspects of malaria diagnostics.

Outside the classroom, the AMTF demonstrated the positive outcomes of collaborative partnerships.

U.S. AFRICOM was the coordinating body that linked everyone together and provided key logistical support. KAIPTC provided facilities and translation services as the majority of the participants were French speakers. The Navy Environmental Preventive Medicine Unit 7 provided expertise on malaria epidemiology in Africa. USARMD-K assisted with facilitating and provided validated training slides from the USAMRD-K Malaria Diagnostic Center.

The Navy Entomological Center for Excellence (NECE) provided lectures on the *Anopheles* mosquito, the vector that causes malaria.

The facilitators came from the 37th Military Hospital and Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research in Accra, providing AMTF with subject matter experts. .

NAMRU-3 Ghana Detachment served as the ‘on the ground’ coordinating link between facilities, transportation, participants, facilitators, supplies and the collaborators from Germany, Kenya, Spain and the U.S.

AMTF was started by AFRICOM in 2014, and according to Letizia, each year the number of participants grows.

“Having 15 different sub-Saharan African countries here means an improvement to the force protection and medical readiness of the military members from these countries,” said Letizia.

The USARMD-K Malaria Diagnostic Center hosted the AMTF in Kisumu, Kenya, last month.

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